



A CIVILIAN OCCUPATION

The Politics of Israeli Architecture

Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman

February 12 - March 30, 2003

Opening reception

February 12, 2003, 7-9 p.m.

Storefront for Art and Architecture
97 Kenmare Street, New York NY 10012

View 1
Taken from Har Homa, a Jewish Neighborhood in Occupied East Jerusalem, looking towards Beit Sahur, a Palestinian town at the outskirts of Bethlehem. On the left is the construction of the wall surrounding Jerusalem. (photo: Daniel Bauer 2003)

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Modi'in Gofit, The Gush Etzion advertisement image, 2002



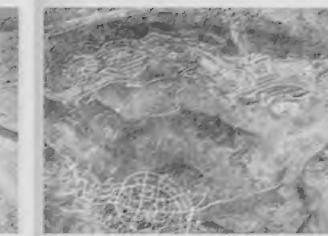
National, Jordan Valley Region, Photograph: Mihail Labkovski for Human Rights Watch, 2002



Golan Heights, Jordan Valley Region, Map: Human Rights Watch, 2002



Jordan Valley Region, the West Bank, Map: Human Rights Watch, 2002



Jordan Valley Region, the West Bank, Map: Human Rights Watch, 2002



The Jewish settlements of Ariel (top) and the Palestinian town of Su'a (bottom), 2002



West Bank, Jordan Valley, 2002



West Bank



West Bank

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Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman
February 12–March 23, 2003

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Storefront for Art and Architecture
97 Kenmare Street, New York City

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National conflicts are characterized not only by the rapid processes of eruptive transformations, but also by the slow duration of building and the lengthy bureaucratic mechanisms of planning. Together these form the scale at which territorial conflicts are played out. Throughout the last century, a different kind of warfare has been radically transforming the landscapes of Israel and Palestine. In it, the mundane elements of planning and architecture have been conscripted as tactical tools in the Israeli state strategy, seeking national and geo-political objectives in the organization of space. The relationship between the landscape and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is symbiotic. The terrain dictates the nature, intensity and focal points of confrontation, while the conflict itself is manifested most clearly in the processes of transformation, adaptation, construction and obfuscation of the landscape and the built environment. The landscape becomes the battlefield in which power and state control confront subversive and direct resistance. In an environment where architecture and planning are systematically instrumentalized as the executive arms of the Israeli State, planning decisions do not often follow criteria of economic sustainability, ecology or efficiency of services, rather, they are employed to serve strategic and political agendas. Space becomes the physical embodiment of a matrix of forces, manifested across the landscape in the construction of roads, hilltop settlements, development towns and garden-suburbs.

In a strange and almost perfect correlation between latitude, political ideology and urban form, each topographical strip became an arena for different phases of the settlement project, promoted by politicians with various agendas, inhabited by settlers of different ideologies in different settlement typologies.

The civilian occupation of the West Bank began in the Jordan Valley during the first years of Israeli rule under Labor governments (1967–1977). Fifteen agricultural villages (Kibbutzim and Moshavim) were built according to the Labor Party plan that sought to establish a secure corridor with Jordan while relying on the principle of maximum security and maximum territory for Israel, with a minimum number of 'hecks.' Following the political turnabout of 1977 in which the Likud party replaced Labor in government, the political climate in Israel changed.

Thereafter scores of new settlements were established in the mountain region, in and around the Palestinian cities, with the intention of annexing the area to prevent territorial concessions.

For the price of a small apartment in Tel Aviv, settlers could purchase their own red-roofed house and benefit from considerable government subsidies. Beyond the economic incentive of these settlements, the climb from the plains to the hills was argued with the rhetoric of 'the regeneration of the land,' as acts of personal and national renewal, and imbued with the mystic quality of the heights.

The mountain peaks of the West Bank easily lend themselves to state seizure. Land ownership has been hard to determine ever since the Ottoman period. During Ottoman times, residents paid tax only on the lands they cultivated. These lands later reverted to private ownership. Whatever land could be proven to be under continuous cultivation remained in private Palestinian ownership, and the rest was declared State Land. Palestinian cultivated lands are found mainly on the slopes and in the valleys, where the agriculturally suitable areas erode down from the limestone slopes of the West Bank peaks. The barren hillsides, a patchwork quilt of isolated plots and discontinuous islands around peaks, were seized by the state. The West Bank was thus doctored across its vertical axis, as almost every area the hillsides were annexed to Israel de facto, while the valleys between them were left under Palestinian ownership.

The Mountain

The topography of the West Bank is easily identified in three long strips of land running from north to south. The most eastern strip, and the lowest in elevation, is the sparsely populated Jordan Valley. To the west rise the high and steep mountains of Judea and Samaria along whose main ridge most large Palestinian cities are located. Further west are the green and fertile slopes of Judea and Samaria. Here, moderate topography, arable soil, an abundance of water and a view overlooking the coastal plain make this region the West Bank's 'Area of High Demand.' It is in this strip that most Palestinian villages and Jewish settlements are located.

This mapping was the end result of an intensive process of photography, analysis and classification, one in which the terrain was charted, topographical lines drafted, slope gradients calculated, and land use marked. The process was so complete and rapid that at the time the 'West Bank' was likely one of the most intensively observed and photographed terrains in the world. This project was not undertaken as an objective study but rather as an act of establishing national proprietorship that anticipated a spatial reality yet to come.

Vertical Planning

As intelligence analysts gave way to cartographers and planners, the stereoscopic images became the primary tool

erected from the air. A special double-lens aerial camera, capable of registering stereoscopic images, was acquired and a series of photographic series was launched. The stereoscopic camera is designed to capture two simultaneous images at a slight angle to one another. When viewed through a special optical instrument, the shades of gray in the two flat images are transformed by the gaze of the intelligence analyst into a three-dimensional illusion of depth, reproducing a tabletop model of the pilot's vertical perspective. Photometrical land surveying from aerial photography, reproduced at variable scales and with remarkable clarity, replaced the conventional land-surveyed maps as the most rapid and practical way of representing the territory.

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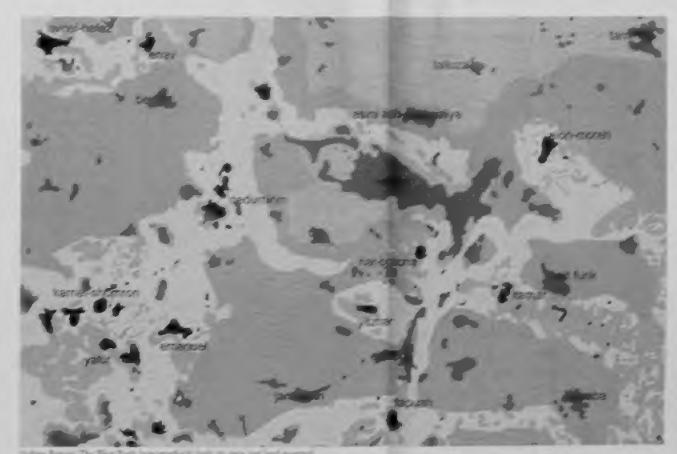
Within the panorama, however, lies a cruel paradox: the very thing that renders the landscape 'Biblical' or 'postural' – its traditional inhabitation and cultivation in terraces, olive orchards, stone buildings and the presence of livestock – is produced by the Palestinians, whom the Jewish settlers came to replace. The very people who cultivate the green olive orchards and tend the landscape Biblical, are themselves excluded from the panorama. The Palestinians are there to produce the scenery and then disappear. The panoramic arrangement of sight-lines therefore serves two contradictory agendas: supervision and a self-imposed screen. The Jewish settlements superimpose another datum of latitudinal geography upon an existing landscape. Settlers could thus see only other settlements, ignore the Palestinian towns and villages, and feel that they have truly arrived 'as the people without land to the land without people.'

Indeed, the form of the mountain settlements is constructed according to geometric guidelines that unite the effectiveness of sight with that of spatial order, thereby providing sight-lines that function to achieve different forms of power, strategic in overlooking main traffic arteries, coastal in overlooking Palestinian towns and villages, and self defense in overlooking the immediate surroundings and approach roads. Settlements become, in effect, optical devices designed to exercise control through supervision and surveillance.

Latitude has become more than the mere relative position on the folded surface of the terrain. It literally functions to establish parallel geographies of 'First' and 'Third' Worlds that inhabit two distinct planar strata in the settling and unrepresented proximity that only the vertical dimension of the mountain could provide. The landscape does not simply signify power relations, but functions as an instrument of domination and control. The extreme relationship that developed between politics, strategy and building practices within the topography of the West Bank exposes the territorial role of the most ubiquitous of architectural typologies. Rather than the cohesive, binary division between two nations across a boundary line, the organization of the 'West Bank' has created multiple separations and provisional boundaries that relate to one another through surveillance and control, an intensification and ramification of power that could be achieved in this form only because of the particularity of the terrain.

By strategically overlooking the valleys where most

Palestinian villages are located, the settlements precipitated the creation of two parallel and self-referential ethno-national-geographies that manifest themselves along the vertical axis in the physical 'above' and 'below.'



West Bank, The West Bank topographical map (1:100,000 scale), 2002

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The Horizontal Panorama

Settlers turn topography into stereographs, forming an architectural landscape with a mesh of scriptural signification that must be extracted from the panorama and read rather than merely seen. No longer seen as a resource to be agriculturally or industrially cultivated, the landscape, imbued with imaginary religious signifiers, established the link that helped revive religious-national myths that displace the very same land ancient with modern time.

In the ideal image of the pastoral landscape, integral to the perspective of colonial tradition, the administration of the rustic panorama is always viewed through the window frames of modernity. The impulse to retreat from the city to the country reverts the virtues of a simpler life close to nature. It draws on the opposition between history and simplicity, the spontaneous and the planned, nature and foreignness, which are nothing but the opposite poles of the axis of vision that stretches between the settlements and their surrounding landscape. Furthermore, the re-creation of the picturesque scenes of a Biblical landscape becomes a testimony to an ancient claim on the land.

Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman

The Vertical Perspective

After the Six Days War in 1967, a new and previously unimagined extent of territory was occupied by the Israeli army. Information about the West Bank was quickly gathered

and results of tactical, land-use and topographical constraints.